Educational Model: The Triad -- Reaching Beyond the Classroom

It’s called the Warren Wilson College Triad and our students will tell you that its three components – academics, work and service – equal more than the sum of their parts. And, no, you won’t find anything else quite like it in all of higher education.

For more than half a century, liberal arts academics, campus work and service to community have been interconnected facets of an educational whole at Warren Wilson. These three Triad elements are more than graduation requirements; each is essential to a one-of-a-kind education that prepares students for successful careers as well as for lives well lived.

The Triad’s foundation is a strong academic program that challenges students while giving them many options. With dozens of majors, minors and concentrations that offer students a variety of learning experiences in the classroom, laboratory and field, Warren Wilson students complete their degrees well prepared for their chosen career paths.

Complementing the rigorous academic offerings at Warren Wilson are integrated work and service programs that, again, allow students to follow their interests and passions. More than 100 campus work crews offer a remarkable range of work experiences, from recycling to blacksmithing to landscaping. Opportunities also abound within the service program, as students explore issue areas such as race and immigration, food security and the environment, often as part of their coursework.

Study abroad through Warren Wilson College International Programs provides further ways for students to enhance their Triad educational experience by learning more about the world and other cultures. Partly through their work crews, students also contribute to the College’s renown as a campus leader in sustainable practices and facilities. In short, the Warren Wilson College Triad offers an educational experience unlike any other.

Work Learning

Warren Wilson is one of seven federally-recognized work colleges in the nation, and our students are essential to the daily operation of the campus. All resident students log 15 hours a week
with one of the more than 100 work crews. Students perform essential functions for the college and are responsible for everything from installing plumbing and designing publications to harvesting timber, repairing campus bikes, raising grass-fed cattle or updating our global information systems.

Skills for Now, Skills for Later

With the Work Program, students earn $3,480 toward the cost of tuition each academic year. Its payoff is much bigger than that. They gain critical professional skills such as organization, time management and communication. Students also assemble an impressive (and eclectic) set of practical, transferable skills by doing work with a real purpose—a distinct advantage when applying for jobs or graduate school. It’s no wonder our graduates are regularly accepted into graduate programs, medical schools and organizations like Teach for America and the National Park Service.

Working Knowledge

These experiences are as fundamental to a student’s education as any they receive in the classroom. Work crew supervisors are educators and mentors. They identify specific learning and performance goals and outline the skills and abilities a student will develop throughout the semester. In addition, a student’s work evaluation is used to calculate a work GPA and is included in an official Work Transcript.

Work Program Mission Statement

The mission of the Work Program is to provide students with productive work that creates opportunities for the Warren Wilson College community to acknowledge, examine, and celebrate the ethics and value of work in the educational process. The Work Program fulfills its mission by:
● Providing a work force that operates the College in a way that benefits students both educationally and financially while serving the community.

● Fostering a positive work ethic, respect for the dignity of labor, and the importance of serving others.

● Strengthening the students’ sense of community through common endeavor and giving students the opportunity to participate in all aspects of operating the College.

● Offering experiential learning that helps to fulfill and enhance the educational mission of the College.

● Providing students with an evaluation of their work, opportunities for reflection on the meaning of their work, and career guidance that encourages all students to make informed choices in planning their life and work.

● Providing opportunities and resources that enhance supervisors’ roles as mentors and teachers.

Crew Patches

What are crew patches?

Each work crew has a patch that reflects various aspects of crew work or crew culture. While many crews already have established patches, each crew is also given the opportunity to design their own patch as previous patch supplies are exhausted. Students are encouraged to do what they wish with that patch: wear it, sew it onto something, or keep it to remember your experience on that crew. See below for instructions on designing a crew patch.